



# A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Programming With and  
For Very Young Adolescent Girls



EMpower

# A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY: PROGRAMMING WITH AND FOR VERY YOUNG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

This is a summary of a more in-depth report of extensive research on programming with and for very young adolescent girls (ages 10-14) across Africa, Latin America and Asia.<sup>1</sup>

## EMpower's 20 Year Legacy of Adolescent Girl-focused Programming

EMpower has deep and rich experience as a partner and funder of local organizations engaged in programming with, for, and by adolescent girls that improves their livelihoods, education and health and well-being. Rooted in a global understanding and affirmation of the power and rights of all adolescent girls, we seek to help sharpen, strengthen and align girl programming through research and learning that apply multiple relevant lenses including age. The aim is for more effective and efficient use of funding, partnership, and replicable models that result in long-lasting change for girls of this and future generations.

## Why Very Young Adolescent Girls?

Very young adolescent (VYA) girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are at a critical point in their lives in terms of their own physical, emotional and social development. They are developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that will shape how their lives unfold. And, at puberty, their families, communities and societies may gate-keep what opportunities they can access or must forego. Knowing this age presents unique challenges and opportunities, we set out to review the extent of programming and research focusing on VYA girls and to identify recommendations to strengthen programming. Our belief is that it is essential to expand the resources and opportunities available to very young adolescent girls, affirming their resilience as they further develop the capacity to successfully navigate later life.

## What We Did

EMpower commissioned research that included a literature review and program scan, an online survey of EMPower grantees, 20 key informant interviews with practitioners and researchers, in-person workshops with program practitioners and VYA girls, 'girl-insight' exercises in Ghana, India, South Africa, and Vietnam with 10-14 year old girls, and focus groups with girls in India and Ghana.

1. A Window of Opportunity: Programming With and For Very Young Adolescent Girls is a research publication with many contributors with Jennifer Catino and Emily Battistini as Principal Researchers.



## WHAT WE FOUND: 6 KEY FINDINGS

In many grassroots organizations, girls join early, stay longer and make meaningful contributions to programming along the way.

- Local grassroots organizations are doing innovative, targeted work with VYA to a much greater degree than previously realized.
- Meaningful involvement of VYA girls in all aspects of the programming is essential to success.
- Families and communities need to be engaged, even when this is not easy.
- Programming should be dynamic, and evolve in response to the changing needs and interests of girls.
- Intentional measures to safeguard girls are critical to program success.
- Strong links between grassroots and global VYA efforts would help propel the field of VYA girl programming and research forward.

**Local organizations already get it. Over 80% of EMpower's 71 grantees that completed the survey are actively programming with VYA girls.**

## What We Recommend: How to support and strengthen work with VYAs

The research revealed encouraging findings about programming with and for VYA girls. Local grassroots organizations are already developing and implementing many best practices involving VYA girls by integrating them throughout programming of their programming, from design and delivery to evaluation and replication.

The overarching recommendation to propel this work further is to *provide local grassroots organizations with financial, material and technical resources necessary to sustain, evaluate and scale their work, with a commitment to long-term, flexible support.*

The findings indicate that there are significant opportunities to further impactful programming through greater engagement between all stakeholders involved in global programming. Local knowledge needs to be shared, documented, evaluated, and financed so that it can be utilized better and more widely.

- Link practitioners within and across regions by creating vibrant communities of practice where organizations from the Global South and the Global North can share, exchange and troubleshoot together.
- Facilitate research-practice partnerships that enable grassroots organizations to evaluate their programs and strengthen related capacities.
- Develop platforms to share the experiences and expertise of local organizations, and assist others in addressing chronic challenges associated with girl-centered programming.
- Act as a catalyst, champion and amplifier of work with VYA girls by encouraging greater investment in this population, raising the profile of innovative programming and demonstrating the impact of more flexible and sustainable grant-making approaches.

## EMPOWER GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: FEMINIST APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY (FAT)



FAT engages regularly with girls' families to retain girls enrollment in STEM programs, which generally appeal to and lean towards boys. FAT visits families of girls who were absent from programming any week, to understand and address the reasons, and thus ensure girls can return and fully participate.



### Applying the Recommendations: What EMpower is Doing

In our global adolescent girl work, we are leveling up funding and programmatic approaches with a VYA girl lens. Working with our grantee partners—many who are already leading the way—we are:

- Sharing the findings of this report through webinars in all region and broad dissemination
- Integrating findings and recommendations from this research in funding decisions and programmatic support
- Serving as a convener and conduit of new learning and practice, seeking and bringing forth knowledge and expertise in VYAG programming—especially from girls themselves.

## EMPOWER GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: NORSAAC

Long-time EMpower Partner, NORSAAC, works with rural youth in Ghana to strengthen their education and well-being through skills development, mentorship and financial education. NORSAAC offers programs for girls with the objective to integrate girls in Ghana into governance, education, and leadership roles. NORSAAC's 'Let the Girls Smile: Say No to Child Marriage' utilizes education, advocacy and implementation to work with very young adolescent girls and their communities to end child marriage.